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GUNMAN'S

HIRLY GIBSON heard the horses thundering after him. He leaned close to the neck of his black stallion and urged: "Faster, Choctaw! Faster! Run right out of those iron shoes, how!"

The big horse, already racing, responded with an extra surge of power. Curly felt he was putting distance between himself and the thundering hoof beats back on the trail. "Only a mile to the Fort, Choctaw, old boy,

Then we'll be safe and sound. Too many of them back there for us to stop and put up a fight, Keep moving, Choctaw?" The black steed obeyed. And then, suddenly,

he stumbled, his head went down, and Choctaw turned a somerset. Curly was hurled viclently from the saddle, far ahead of the flashing hoofs. The impact of the fall knocked the breath out of Curly and left him momentarily stunned. The first thing he realized was a dull pounding. It seemed to be inside of his head, "I've scrambled my brains!" thought Curly.

The haze began to lift. He realized them that the pounding was not inside his head, at least not all of it. Curly was sprawled out, literally lying on his right ear. And that ear was picking up the thump-thump-thump of hoofs. He roused his bruised body to action. Down the slope to the left was a clump of mesquite. If he could reach cover, he might be able to get away. It was worth a try. He scrambled as quickly and quietly as possible

The cover was even better than he had boned. Beyond the mesquite was rocky terrain, abounding in man-sized crevices and dark caves. Curly wriggled into a likely opening and lay still. He could hear his pursuers salking now.

"Nothin' like a little of hemp across the trail to trip up a hoss!" chuckled one.

"Or kill a rider!" growled somebody else. "Well this here rider didn't get killed,"

declared the first voice. "You can see right here's where he fell, and he got up and away under his own power." "He didn't get far. Thar's his hoss!"

The voices faded to a mumble. Curly wondered whether they had moved away or were

whispering. He strained to hear, but couldn't catch the words, until he heard, "What'll we do with his hoss? The critter's limpin'"

"We got no time to fool with a gimpy nag-Shoot him!" Curly's heart choked his throat. He wanted to cry out, but his voice failed him. He was shaking with anger, fear, dismay. If only he had a gun .

A voice floated up to him. "Kind of a purty hoss. Look at them eyes. Pleadin', you might sav." "Hosse the palayer and squeeze that trig-

ger!" came the snapped retort. Curly couldn't stand it. He squirmed out

of his cave and raced toward the voices. No longer was he careful to be quiet. His feet clopped, loose stones rolled and clicked.

Although the men beard him coming, they had expected only a youth, not a cyclone Curly burst upon them. One of the men chuckled, "I knew that

talk about his hoss would bring him out of hiding That was a real smart trick, if I do say so my own self "

Curly supped a hard fist to the man's face, putting a stop to the chuckling As the man fell, his companions leaped into action One reached tor his gun Gurly dived and tackled

The two sprawled and went rolling over and

over. Curly twisted the gun wrist and the sixshooter flooped to the ground. The others couldn't take a shot at Curly without danger

of striking their own man. The wrestling was brief but frantic. The man was heavier than Curly, and he finally got

the youth down. He knelt on Curly's stomach and raised his fist to smash against the lad's mouth. Curly wrenched his head saide at the last moment, and the fist crashed against the rocky ground.

"Oh, my hand's broke!" cried the assailant, Curly took advantage. While his opponent

was concentrating on the stinging hand, Curly slid from under and clouted the fellow on the side of the law.

Two men dived at him from either side. He dodred deftly, and they crashed against each other. While they were tangled. Curly lashed out with both fists. Four down, one to go.

But the fifth man was not to be so easily taken. He stood as he had from the beginning, holding Choctaw, the rein in his left hand. In his right was the pistol with which the black horse had been threatened. It was now leveled at Curly. The hand was steady and the eyes were cold

"You're a regular wildcat, ain't you, Curly? Well, you hetter put those fists in the nir. If you don't. I'm going to punch you with one of these little ol' lead boxing gloves in this here six-eun. And if I kayo you, you won't never git up, even if the referce counts to a million!"

Curty started slowly raising his hands, "You want me to put my hands up?" The question sounded innocent, if silly The man paid no attention to the emphasis on the last word.

"Up! You catch on!" snarled the gunman. "Up then," said Curly "Til put my hands un! And you put your hands up Choctaw!"

"Up Choctaw!" The big black horse knew that command, His forelegs'rose, and he snorted and half-danced. The sudden tug at the rein threw the gunman off balance. Curly rushed in, slashed the gun arm downward with his

left hand and blazed his right into the man's

The fellow went down as if poleaxed. In a few seconds. Curly had kayoed five armed

men. But he wasn't paying them any heed. Curly was busy examining his beloved Choctaw, feeling the horse's legs, sighing with relief that the great animal had suffered no serious injury. Only when he had satisfied himself as to

that did he been to consider the possibility that the gunmen would be coming to very shortly. He collected all their guns. With one of these he fired three sharp shots. He honed someone at the Port, which was less than a mile away, would hear and come to investigate. Curly wasn't sure exactly what to do with the five outlaws, and he didn't relish the idea of standing around knocking them out all day long.

His signal brought a response faster than he had expected. A patrol of soldiers from the Fort had been scouting nearby.

TURLY explained briefly what had happened. "I was on my way to the Fort when these hombres jumped me in Red-eye Pass," he said. "I reckon they simed to kidnap me and try to set something out of Dad. They took my gun, but then I got a chance to slip loose and fork Choctaw I figured he could outrun any of their critters and he could, too, only they had a rope stretched across the trail that spilled me."

"Well, we had a little fight, and there they are. Would you take care of 'em, Sergeant Green? Tie 'em up and place 'em under arrest and all that? I've got an appointment at the Fort and I'm late now."

"Why, sure, Curly," grinned the goodnatured sergeant, "Be glad to. But why are you in such an all-fired hurry to get to the

Enet?" "I'm to meet Captain Dempsey," said Curly.

"He promised to give me a boxing lesson." THE END



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